

Message Text

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S E C R E T DAMASCUS 4508

EXDIS

FOR USDEL SECRETARY

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: OVIP (VANCE, CYRUS)
SUBJECT: APPROACH TO SYRIA ON SITUATION IN NORTHERN LEBANON

REFS: A) SECTO 9014, B) STATE 198388

1. SAW SYRIAN FONMIN KHADDAM MORNING AUGUST 7 TO MAKE APPROACH REFTELS, DIVIDING MY PRESENTATION INTO TWO MAIN POINTS: THE ESCALATION OF FIGHTING IN BEIRUT AND THE REPORTS OF LARGE-SCALE MILITARY ACTION BEGINNING AUGUST 8-10. ALSO TRANSMITTED SECRETARY'S MESSAGE THAT HE WAS WORKING PERSONALLY TO REVERSE ACTION TAKEN BY HOUSE ON SYRIAN AID.

2. KHADDAM SAID HE WISHED TO ASSURE THE SECRETARY THAT SYRIAN FORCES IN BEIRUT WERE EXERCISING THE UTMOST SELF RESTRAINT. THROUGHOUT THE PAST WEEK CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAD BEEN ESCALATING THEIR ACTIONS AND PROVOCATIONS. YESTERDAY (AUGUST 6) FOR EXAMPLE, CHRISTIAN MILITIAS HAD WAITED UNTIL SYRIAN
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FORCES WERE BREAKING THE RAMADAN FAST JUST AFTER SUNSET AND THEN HAD SURPRISED THEM WITH HEAVY ARTILLERY ATTACK SUPPORTED BY MACHINE GUN AND OTHER FIRING ON SYRIAN POSITIONS. NATURALLY, KHADDAM SAID, DETERRENT FORCES COULD NOT STAND IDLE IN THE FACE OF THIS MASSIVE PROVOCATION BUT THEY HAD LIMITED THEIR RETURN FIRE TO THE SOURCES OF FIRING ON THEM.

3. KHADDAM SAID THAT IN SYRIA'S VIEW LATEST ESCALATION IN BEIRUT COULD NOT BE ISOLATED FROM THE ATTITUDE OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN THE SOUTH. SYRIA BELIEVED THE ISRAELIS, PHALANGISTS AND CHAMOUNISTS WERE ESCALATING THE SITUATION IN BEIRUT TO CREATE A NEW PROBLEM WHICH WOULD DIVERT ATTENTION FROM THE SOUTH. THERE WAS NO OTHER EXPLANATION FOR MILITIAS' BEHAVIOR.

4. KHADDAM ADDED THAT DURING HIS RECENT VISIT TO BEIRUT HE AND PRES. SARKIS HAD AGREED THAT SARKIS WOULD MAKE A NEW ATTEMPT TO SOLVE THE SECURITY PROBLEM IN BEIRUT POLITICALLY. KHADDAM SAID HE HAD ASSURED SARKIS THAT HE COULD DEPEND ON SYRIAN SUPPORT IN THIS EFFORT AND SARKIS HAD BEEN VERY SATISFIED. HE HAD TOLD SARKIS SYRIA WAS NOT AGAINST STATIONING LEBANESE POLICE AT SENSITIVE POINTS IN EAST BEIRUT. A SHORT TIME AGO, HOWEVER, SARKIS HAD SENT 20 POLICEMEN TO TAKE OVER ONE CHECKPOINT BUT SEVERAL HOURS THEREAFTER THE PHALANGISTS HAD DISARMED THEM AND EVICTED THEM FROM EAST BEIRUT. UNFORTUNATELY, THE MILITIAS WERE NOT ACTING OUT OF THEIR COUNTRY'S INTERESTS BUT WERE CARRYING OUT ORDERS FROM ISRAEL. THEIR HSELLING OF WEST BEIRUT, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS AN OBVIOUS ATTEMPT TO EXPAND THE FIGHTING. SYRIA WAS PUTTING PRESSURE ON THE PARTIES IN WEST BEIRUT NOT TO RESPOND TO THESE PROVOCATIONS.

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5. SYRIA BELIEVES IT IS POSSIBLE TO SOLVE THE SECURITY SITUATION IN BEIRUT POLITICALLY, KHADDAM REPEATED. IT IS NECESSARY, HOWEVER, FOR ALL THOSE INTERESTED IN HELPING SARKIS TO PUT ADDITIONAL PRESSURE ON THE MILITIAS TO STOP THEIR PROVOCATIVE ACTIONS. CHAMOUN, IN PARTICULAR, MUST BE PERSUADED NOT TO ESCALATE TENSIONS FURTHER. SYRIA WAS READY TO COOPERATE IN THIS BUT AT SAME TIME THE ADF COULD NOT WITHDRAW ITS FORCES SINCE THIS WOULD ONLY ENCOURAGE THE MILITIAS. A SECOND COURSE OF ACTION OPEN TO PRES. SARKIS WOULD BE TO IMPOSE SECURITY BY FORCE BUT THIS WAS UP TO HIM. ANY OTHER (THIRD) COURSE WOULD ONLY BE ASSISTING THE PHALANGISTS AND THE CHAMOUNISTS TO IMPOSE THEIR DOMINATION. KHADDAM NOTED THAT ONLY FIVE PERCENT OF SYRIA'S MILITARY CAPABILITY IN BEIRUT WAS BEING UTILIZED. IF SARKIS WISHED TO TAKE DECISION TO MOVE MILITARILY AGAINST THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS SYRIA WAS READY TO HELP HIM. DURING HIS VISIT IN FACT, SEVERAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS HAD COME TO SARKIS ASKING HIM TO FORM A GOVERNMENT CONFRONTATION TO CONFRONT THE MILITIAS. KHADDAM SAID SARKIS HAD TOLD HIM HE WOULD CONSIDER HOW THE PROBLEM OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN BEIRUT

COULD BEST BE HANDLED FOR A COUPLE OF DAYS AND THEN
BE BACK IN TOUCH.

6. TURNING TO THE SECOND POINT, KHADDAM SAID THIS
WAS THE FIRST TIME SYRIA HAD HEARD OF POSSIBLE MILITARY
ACTION BEGINNING AUGUST 8-10. ANY MILITARY MOVES (BY SYRIA)
WOULD BE LINKED TO DECISIONS OF THE LEBANESE
GOVERNMENT AS WELL AS THE ACTUAL SITUATION ON THE
GROUND, HE SAID SYRIA WOULD CONTINUE TO EXERT EVERY
EFFORT TO PREVENT EXPANSION OF THE FIGHTING BY OTHER
PARTIES, BE THEY LEBANESE OR PALESTINIAN. IN CLOSING,
HE SAID, HE WISHED ONCE AGAIN TO ASSURE THE SECRETARY
SYRIA HAD NO DESIRE TO ESCALATE THE SITUATION. ON THE
CONTRARY, SYRIA WISHED TO END THE FIGHTING IN LEBANON.

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7. MR. KHADDAM ASKED THAT HIS GREETINGS BE SENT TO THE
SECRETARY.

8. COMMENT: WHAT KHADDAM APPEARED TO BE SAYING WAS THAT
SYRIA DOES NOT CONSIDER ITS PRESENT POSTURE AS USING MILITARY
FORCE BUT RATHER AS SHOWING RESTRAINT AND SUPPORTING
ANOTHER POLITICAL EFFORT BY PRES. SARKIS TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM
WITH THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS IN EAST BEIRUT BY POLITICAL MEANS.
KHADDAM LEFT OPEN THE OPTION OF MILITARY FORCE AGAINST CHAMOUN
AND THE KATAEB WHICH COULD WELL MEAN HE HAD BEEN ENCOURAGING
SARKIS IN THIS DIRECTION. HIS BITTER COMMENTS
ABOUT CHAMOUN AND THE MILITIAS' CONTINUING
PROVOCATIONS INDICATED HIS OWN PERSONAL LACK OF
CONFIDENCE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF REACHING A
NEGOTIATED LEBANESE-TYPE SOLUTION WITH THE MILITIA
LEADERSHIP.
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